

## UTPA wants more women STEM professors

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EDINBURG — Only 18 percent of all faculty in science, technology, engineering and math — or STEM — fields at the University of Texas-Pan American are women, compared with the national average of 28 percent.

The representation in tenured and tenure-track positions is even lower, at 14 percent, said Havidán Rodríguez, UTPA's provost and vice president for academic affairs.

The representation of Hispanic females is only 11 percent.

“In terms of leadership, the share of STEM women in chair, associate dean or dean positions is zero percent, with no women being placed at those levels,” said Dr. Ala Qubbaj, UTPA's vice provost for faculty affairs.

On Tuesday, UTPA announced a program to increase these percentages and recruit more women and specifically Latinas into STEM fields.

The institution got a big boost toward this objective from the National Science Foundation ADVANCE program that awarded a \$3.1 million to use in the five next years.

“Research has shown that female representation and advancement in academic STEM positions are affected by many external factors that are unrelated to their ability, interest and technical skills,” Rodríguez said.

Hurdles include discrimination and a lack of support services like child and adult day care.

Even subtle discrimination “can hurt more than direct discrimination,” said Cristina Villalobos, associate professor and mathematics director at the Center of Excellence in STEM Education, who is one of the two Latinas teaching in the 35 member faculty of the Math Department at UTPA.

Rodríguez said the effort will address “faculty recruitment and advancement, policy and climate, education and empowerment and social science research that is intended to broaden and deepen the knowledge base related to issues that hinder the success of women, particularly Latinas in the STEM fields.”

One goal of the project, which will start Oct. 1, will be to double the current number of female STEM faculty members. The university will seek to increase the number of assistant professors by 50 percent, double the number of female associate professors and triple the number of female professors.

It will also work in its policies to accommodate a more family-oriented lifestyle that will benefit female professors.

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**Martha L. Hernández covers health, business and general assignments for *The Monitor* and *El Nuevo Herald*. She can be reached at [mlhernandez@themonitor.com](mailto:mlhernandez@themonitor.com) and (956) 683-4846.**

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